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Alternative Methodologies for the Appropriation of Space

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by

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ABSTRACT

Post-war socioeconomic shifts have reconfigured the built environment to complex networks of private, commodified zones masquerading as public space. These spaces are inextricably linked to marketing strategies, financial gains, sustained economic growth. Here, actual uses and potential new uses of space are forcefully suppressed. This is evidenced by the “War” on Graffiti.

Graffiti causes no structural damage; because it disrupts the image of space it is fought and suppressed. An investigation into its constructs might unveil a complex political infrastructure which implicates society, consumerism, and architecture. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to investigate the disconnect between mediated use of space built from image and the actual use of space built from need, to establish a methodology that translates the politics of graffiti from visual/graphic to spatial/occupiable. The found paradigms will be applied to three designs: a rural cycling lane, privacy shells in suburbia, an urban workplace.
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Constructing Consumer Society
1.1 Introduction

This thesis intends to critically evaluate the subversive visual tactics of Graffiti and the Fringe Arts, and apply those methodologies Architecturally to challenge and disrupt the pre-conceived act of dwelling in directed, commodified environments. These evaluations will manifest themselves in built form through instantiations of a three-phase design project: first, of private, small-scale, occupiable human spaces in public realms; second, of a humanly navigable space in an automobile-scaled environment; third, of a design studio in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania whose implementation is ground in the theoretical discourse of this paper and diagrammatic information gleaned from the aforementioned spatial explorations.

In order to discuss the implications Graffiti may have on Architecture and its processes, we must first address basic issues from which the discourse will grow. First, we must understand what socioeconomic factors could have led to the explosion of Graffiti in the early 1980's, how did these same factors affect design and, significantly, how did these factors affect Architecture? We must also evaluate its perpetuation: why, after Graffiti has been commodified and reconstituted as a graphic application, is it still very publicly fought and punished? How does it implicate Architecture, and how might Architecture be informed by its curious longevity?
1.2 Modernity to Consumer Driven Design

The foundation for modern architecture had been laid in Germany before the first World War, but it would be after the defeat of the old German Imperial Order in 1918 that the movement would be tested. A young architect named Walter Gropius described the scene as “an era of dissolution without guidance,” referring both to the pending social collapse as well as the abundance of unbuilt paper projects, foretelling, respectively, some new social order and environment.

The next year, The Bauhaus was formed when two institutions - the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts - were combined. As leader of the new academy, Gropius charged the school and his students with a sort of social responsibility, an aesthetic sensibility that was in line with utility and standardization. He actively sought to transcend the trap of whimsical formalism by embracing the machine and its inherent constraints.

Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was also one of the many great modern architects to inform (and be informed by) the growing movement within the school. The rectilinear style he developed was also directly in line with Gropius’ vision for a new Germany through standardized, machine driven design. His opposition to ‘formalism’ in lieu of practicality is evidenced in his description of the Concrete Office Building, calling it, “…a house of work… of organization, of clarity of economy. …The maximum effect with the minimum expenditure of means.”

2. Ibid 160
Neither architect would realize much of anything until 1925 outside of conceptual projects funded by the school. Even then, because of the burgeoning right wing fervor, the ‘bolshevising’ architects would continue to struggle. This struggle would only worsen as the Nazi party gained momentum across Germany, laying the foundations for World War II and creating an unsafe environment for designers guilty of infecting the country with ‘cultural degeneracy’. The school would close in 1933, with Mies van der Rohe at its helm. As the political climate became increasingly unstable, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and several other prominent architects of the institution would emigrate to the United States.

The architects’ movement would ultimately gain a global appeal, as their intentions of social engineering and environmental determinism were in line with the conservation and rationing taking place around the world.

By the time World war II was coming to its nuclear conclusion in the Pacific, modernism, as a social institution, was increasingly obsolete. The world had drastically changed since its utopian inception. Its failure to resolve societal ills in Germany and other war-ravaged countries made modernism a difficult sell in westernized countries who were celebrating the spoils of war. Political leaders saw the majority of their people abundantly ready to shed the burdens of war-time rationing and once again enjoy consumer pleasures and material rewards. This

3. ibid 199
was most clearly evidenced in England where Winston Churchill and the conservative party regained political control under the electioneering promise to ‘Set the People Free.’ And so they did. Fiscally, the ensuing unprecedented explosion of consumerism meant economies could remain kicked in war-time production speeds, only this time the ‘good fight’ had less to do with defeating fascism so much as it did ‘get into the consumers’ face and luridly sell a product’. The desire for products laid the foundations for a new consumer driven society and economy, and established new requirements of self expression through unabashed purchasing of these products.

To preserve this new financial base, Planned Obsolescence, the design focusing on the fleeting attention span of consumers, quickly hurdled buzzword-status and became firmly rooted in business planning, marketing, and consumer economics. The idea is ground in perpetually increasing production by ‘anticipating’ flaws, problems and general trend shifts on regulated intervals (yearly for automobiles, seasonally for fashion, etc.). This concept was one to be avoided by the Modernists because it had the potential to encourage fickle, blissfully irresponsible attitudes toward the design and subsequent purchasing of objects. “Exactly,” says artist Richard Hamilton, one of the first individuals to defend planned obsolescence. Hamilton contended that it was a “basic social good”; it catered toward the societal celebration through purchase, stimulated economic engines, and afforded designers the opportunity to design more. In order to fully capitalize on this situation, he contended, designers must begin to pay more attention to consumer patterns, markets,

motivation; designers must design a new consumer to each new product.

"The consumers role in capitalism is to consume. A successful (i.e., profitable) product is not one that fulfills deeply-felt needs, nor one that creates an enriching aesthetic experience. It is the product shaped by design which can incorporate an idea that will make it marketable. If we are to understand how design works and, indeed, shapes the fabric of a capitalist society, we need -as the media commentators of the period insisted- to look at design in the context of advertising, marketing and retailing. Only then can we understand the real role of design: to sell goods."

The whimsical formalism inherent in the product boom was in stark contrast to the aims of the Bauhaus modern movement, which insisted upon a designed object (be it a chair, teapot, or building) imbued with thoughtful social awareness. There are innumerable reasons as to why modern architecture 'failed'. Most criticisms will immediately call to mind the great inhumaness of the movement; that the tall buildings were the cause of social isolation. Or also that the strong political nature of the movement unfairly imposed a social agenda. These arguments aren't of course, without rebuttal. Modernism exists today, though largely as an aesthetic institution. Both skyscrapers and products that appear to echo Mies van der Rohe' affinity for economy and function continue to be built today. However their tendency is not to house the poor or displaced any longer; the powerful image of modern architecture is a symbol of refined taste, of thoughtfulness, and of money. How might this have happened?
1.3 Consumer Society

Unapologetic consumption and demand for material satisfaction was a key element in the rise of Social Mobility, another major unprecedented occurrence in the 1960’s. Young adults who previously were expected to retain the aspirations and roles of their parents could now realistically break with that convention. This was partly because of the utopianistic efforts of the modernists, who were still indeed very present in society, and an economy bolstered with a new influx of capital which was non dependent on war to sustain itself. This reality became bigger than both the economic boom of consumerism and ethical, honest mandates in modern design, and would in turn inform those two in further evolution of design and economic markets.

This new social mobility, as it informed design, brought the reality of purchasing to the forefront of society; consumers were going to purchase a product as a declaration of freedom and individuality. The question no longer dealt with whether or not to buy, but what color, make, model, version to buy; a former have/have-not society was transformed into a have/have-better.

Entertainment from both the television and movies were no exception and, as Hamilton described, were tailored specifically to statistics, mass appeal, the newly designed consumer. The creative sterilization and homogenizing of media allowed

7. Ibid
this rapidly growing number of consumers to feel they are in touch with themselves and one another, reducing consumers to a unique passivity, which was historically new. The role of the television was exalted, creating a near-global platform with which to dictate controlled desire for fashions in everything from buildings to clothing, and gave a reassuring illusion of cultural unity and vitality to those whose lives are dependant on identifying with said culture. Consumers, responding to the dialogue created by status and product, were encouraged to suppress their inherent differences, participate and conform.

Significant realities are masked by the self-satisfaction of mass culture: the system ultimately serves only those who thrive on consumer dependency. What was once a privilege to be won has now become a right to be demanded and received. The aggressive, exponential expansion of mass-media and advertising is delivered to you in your home; the consumer only need wait to be pleased, and in this way is continuously pacified. Choice, like the graphic media which assaults the senses in its veiled sexuality, is reconfigured to appear more abundant, intentionally confusing, and at its core, pointless. In this case, it is precisely the financial convenience of commercially viable and reproducible media that, by ceaselessly stimulating our simplest somatic sensations, impoverishes our conceptual abilities and crushes our imaginations.

The uniqueness of this passivity is found in the frantic perpetuation of material products and styles: keeping pace requires action and is constantly asking its consumers to be mobile

and 'involved' with society and culture. In this, the consumer-citizen is immersed in a firmly bound sub-environment and is constantly stimulated by a barrage of identifiable material choices which appear both culturally and self referential. Which trend is accepted and rejected? How closely should trend be followed? Where might conscious decisions of conformity or nonconformity place one along this seemingly complex identity spectrum? The passive, latent states of conformity and resignation are veiled by this material assault, in that highly political decisions (though not at all politically relevant) are made daily which seem to immediately impact the individual. An inadvertent slip - the right shoes but the wrong pants, the right pants but the wrong belt, an outfit whose image does not adequately describe the mood its wearer woke up with that day - may cause one to slide towards the left, right, or moderate center of the spectrum. The constituents of a material culture are highly active, mobile, informed individuals.

The culture is maintained at the expense of a creativity that emerges from an imagination stirred by confrontation with every kind of experience and actuality. The active-satisfaction of mass culture successfully prohibits this in what it asks its citizens to instead confront and resolve. Which cop show defines me as a person; does the fat black guy sing better than the skinny white nerd? The tragedy found in this is not that consumer culture pretends that there is no crisis, it simply states "there is no crisis here."

As Richard Hamilton previously observed, designers willing to reevaluate their current design methods to accommodate purchase-crazed populations could tap into an unprecedented job security. After all, the effects of post-war consumerism did not simply pump more money into the design disciplines of Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Industrial Design; it practically gave birth to them. Though Fashion, Graphics, and Industrial Design were present well before the 1960’s, they certainly did not occupy the forefront of society in the manner they do now.

The pace of which economic machines ran would happily handle the nearly-global implications of six graduated levels of essentially the same cappuccino machine for every kitchen, new dishware and matching oven mitts for each season.

As this financial freight train gained speed and matured, we would find that this new society born out of consumerism had an inherent price of admission. Essential objects of utility no longer exist as such; they are now printed, glossed over in magazines, and pumped up as targets of desire for those people who, at the very least, could purchase the lowest end model. What of those groups who do not have the care or financial capacity to participate in this newfound consumerist boom?
This trendy new homogenized culture indeed had a price tag, and the membership had to be renewed at the pace of a material culture whose products were designed, as previously mentioned, to be unpopular - and discarded - with each change of the seasons. Given both the graphic nature of material culture and the frantic pace of which it moved, the members and non-members of contemporary post-war society became almost instantly recognizable as to who was a part of what. And thus, the sociopolitical lines were redrawn to separate those who could afford the membership rates from those who could not. Individuals who had the financial capital (or at least represented having it) were accepted into society, regarded as newly addressable constituents by an onslaught of graphic and televised advertisement hoping to push more product at them. Individuals without the means to participate were left to watch corporations dominate the public forum with messages about products and services of which they would never own, essentially making them the outsiders of a culture.
Images in Urbanity
2.1 Modernism Consumed

Few architectural strategies have been so publicly vilified as the housing project "Pruitt-Igoe." Designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki and George Hellmuth in 1951, the project was, from the beginning, doomed: liberals were attacking the project for sequestering the poor away from society, conservatives for attempting to coddle the poor in the first place. The original strategy called for two to three story row houses, like New York City's Greenwich Village. It was scrapped by new mayor Joseph Darst, who "typified the new breed of big-city mayors who came to power in the post-war period," by building his platform on business interest and redevelopment. Darst openly admired the new high-rise public housing of New York, instead of the smaller, historic neighborhoods. He put pressure on the St. Louis Housing Authority to start construction on his terms: big city projects with the involvement of developers, federal aid packages, and the promise of incentives for businesses. Building contractors recognized a highly lucrative opportunity, inflated their bids to point that public-housing construction costs were 60 percent above the national average. Because the project was a low income housing project, the Public Housing Administration refused to raise its unit cost ceilings to accommodate the swollen contractor bids, expecting the contractors to lower their estimates. The contractors held their ground, so the city responded by raising densities, reducing room sizes, and removing various amenities. Ahhh bureaucracy. The first tower to be erected, christened Cochran Gardens, would win architectural awards.

2. ibid
A few years later, disrepair, vandalism, and crime plagued the infamous proposal. Large numbers of vacancies indicated even the poorest of people preferred to live anywhere but Pruitt-Igoe. In 1972, despite more than 5 million spent to cure its ills, 3 of the high-rise buildings were demolished. 1 year later, in a highly publicized event, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development declared Pruitt-Igoe unsalvageable and consequently razed the remaining structures.

Pruitt-Igoe's destruction is generally accepted as symbolizing the end of the Modern Style of Architecture. Its short life span and thorough destruction is also largely indicative of both the cheapening and consumerisation of the built environment, as well as the waning power and influence of the Architect. Perhaps most critical, it was the public perception of architecture that was most reconfigured: architecture, like everything else that is geared toward trend, statistics and fleeting public interest, could now be thrown away like a plastic cigarette lighter. Modernism, the grand utopian movement that sought to heal the wounds of society by mending the urban fabric with architecture imbued with socialism, had just symbolically been relieved of its duty. Any political power that may have existed in the movement was cored out, devoured by the freight train of the consumer machine. It was able to devour any political power the modern institution sought to build, and regurgitate it as a vacant shell, a copy without an original. Completely devoid of any political or social power, modernism was represented to the world as the simulation that it is today.

3. ibid
2.2 ART, POLITICS, AND ARCHITECTURE

If we assume that modernism was symbolically depoliticized in the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe, then we can also make the assumption that the movement did indeed, at some point, have the political power to incite positive change. While we do know how this power was lost, it is necessary to recall the turmoil and near bedlam that persisted in the inter-war German state that ultimately gave birth to utopian modernism. Bankrupt, facing a massive housing shortage and impending dictatorship, an architectural movement was developed at the fraying fringe of the existing urban fabric. In the wake of its consumption by the western economic machine, discourse regarding art, politics, and architecture was generated to both make sense of what had just taken place and, significantly, how we move forward from it.

Architecture has special significance as the most public of all forms of art and design; in its purest manifestation it most acutely influences the social. This distinguishes architecture from all other design disciplines, in that it has the capacity to act autonomously as a critical commentary on the realm of the real. The very presence of Architecture gives it a social impact; its mere physicality threatens to instill a new status quo. But in its current arrangement, any aspect of the social will be scripted; the implementation of a status quo acutely tooled to accommodate

target demographics and buyers. All that is left is the aesthetic, the image. Given this, any negativity, any critical capacity within architecture is all but cancelled by the positivity of its presence and represented as a simulation. The politics of the spatial and its present kinship with focused, calculated business ventures purges any hope of an alternative meaning and unpredictability. If Architecture is to have any hope of regaining the means to adequately reflect the complexity of the human act of dwelling, it should both seek to adopt methodologies not typically associated with the profession, and eschew notions that a regurgitated consumerist image can address the social.

Architects, as they resolve function and economy to arrive at a successful solution, do have a level of proctored control over aesthetics and form. A point discussed previously, however, raises awareness to the potential depoliticisation of a bound and mediated design; Architecture is no exception to this. Michel Foucault is a philosopher who recognizes inherent problems with the dated notion of asking the visual to operate, on its own, as a driver of social change. The argument that the visual cannot, in itself, resolve social problems, was posed by the early modernists who were convinced of their architecture's formal capacity to dictate and imprint upon society, inducing positive change. Foucault ascertains that Architecture "can and does produce positive social effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom. Only

6. ibid
politics, however, can address the social, although architecture can contribute in some way- provided it is in league with the political.

He clarifies his position with relevance to users and occupants:

"It is not the form of the panopticon which controls the behavior of inmates; it is the politics of its use; the fact that the building is operating as a prison, which is ultimately determinant of behavior, and architecture is merely supporting the politics of use through its efficient layout. It is not the architect who has control; the architect has no power over me."

Even the most thoughtful architectural premises, most notably the supremely well-intentioned ideals of the fathers of modernism, can be exhausted of their political potential and thus become ineffective visual symbols, vacant of meaning. What was once the architectural language of socialism - an architecture intended to be inhabited by the impoverished and the well-to-do alike - became consistently occupied by the former.

In this most basic beginning of gentrification, people were aligned and sequestered by demographic into such places, creating fringe-of-culture mindsets. Essentially, a person would assume the identity of their environment and wear it as a badge of honor.

7. ibid
2.3 CONDITIONS OF THE URBAN FRINGE

Lebbeus Woods, whose writing also deals extensively with fringes manifest by violence - be it economic, political, even physical - describes the people who will come to inhabit the fringe-of-culture areas as "people of crisis, pushed usually unwillingly to confrontation with limits, borderline cases of every sort, adventurers, criminals, inventors, con-artists, opportunists, people who cannot, or have not been allowed to fit in elsewhere...they are nomads of the body, refugees of the mind, restless, itinerant, looking without much chance of finding a sure way either forward or back. Instead, they turn the situation into an advantage, making uncertainty a virtue, strangeness an ally."

Aaron Rose, coeditor and coordinator of the graphic arts tour Beautiful Losers, also recognizes and describes subcultures that exist largely beyond the recognition of mainstream culture:

"They sustain independent systems of creation, display, and reception. Their creative activities are driven by the intense identification with their community's specific cultural expressions, interests, and histories. While they occupy the edges of society, they are nonetheless key to the forward movement of our culture in general."

It is both the community identification and seemingly contrary independence

from fabricated images of mainstream culture that makes Rose's statement so compelling. He expands on this point, again using a vocabulary that inherently references urbanity, creativity, and culture - and their syntheses as it relates to place:

"The social substrate they occupy is the breeding ground for new ideas and forms of expression; from this location it is possible to generate a vast cultural diversity that society draws from in order to refresh itself, evolve, and survive."

The spaces of extreme conditions - those of which the occupants of the fringe inhabit - have been brought into being by radical political and socioeconomic transformations. These regions, especially those farther from the symbolic financial center are maintained very differently than those nearer, as the institutions nearest the center require an image that ensures profitability and significantly, the secure predictability that will not disrupt a scripted, patterned lifestyle. The places where the system either cannot or will not maintain will therefore be occupied and maintained in a radically different manner.

Woods explores the concept of "heterarchy" versus hierarchy, a phenomenon of alternative social orderings found at urban fringes manifest by destruction:

"...It is an organization whose authority (or sources of wisdom) exists in a static balance of rational determinism. Heterarchies will concern themselves with continuously shifting, dynamic fields of activity in which absolute and relative, objective and subjective, no longer have meaning."

10. ibid
Mainstream marketing, ad campaigns, target demographics become irrelevant here; the image constructed at the center is easily ignored because, even from the beginning, it has never followed through on its claims. In this instance, we can see the heterarchical claiming dominance over the hierarchical, subjective knowledge competing with objective. This expansion of knowledge and potential instantiation of community has the potential to become a direct reflex of the environment. Therefore, if art can be understood in the figurative sense as the societal *mirror* and not the hammer (this latter approach it appears to assume only when it is intensely commodified), then the built environment of the edge, as it is dictated by the inhabitants and its immediate sociopolitical constraints, becomes the synthesis of art and architecture: use, form, and function. Within the context of urban Germany, these constraints were central and paramount to the birth of modernism, and key to its political capacity before its symbolic destruction. Within the context of urban New York, however, similar constraints would give birth to a wholly different, far less noble institution; one whose curious ubiquity and longevity is rooted in the mass marketing / mass media machine that essentially destroyed modernism.
2.4 MEDIA SATURATION AND BACKLASH

Jean Baudrillard, a French Theorist and Professor, locates the beginnings of post-modern advertising and the solicitation of mass ideas at the market crash of 1929 and the October Revolution. From there, he claims, the language of ideas and the language of commodities converged, thus recouping and packaging propaganda to not incite fear but to manipulate and appeal to human desires.

"Propaganda became the merchandising and marketing of idea-forces, of political men and parties with their 'trade-mark image'. This convergence defines a society where there is no difference between the economic and the political, and subsequently the social, because now the same agitated language reigns in all three. The solicitation of the social is everywhere, present on walls, in hot and bloodless voices of female radio announcers, in the accents of the sound track and in the multiple tonalities of the image track that is played everywhere before our eyes. ...A vestige of sociality hallucinated on all the walls in the simplified form of a demand of the social that is immediately met by the echo of advertising. The social as a script, whose bewildered audience we are."

There are two compelling concepts raised in the quote above that will be expanded on. First, Baudrillard traces the convergence of three formerly separate languages into one as a by-product of propaganda's transformation into mass-appeal advertising. This will be immediately explored. Next, the paragraph is composed in a manner that makes several spatial implications; given Baudrillard's background in language and meaning, it can be assumed...
that this is intentional and can thus serve as a jump-off point to which Architecture can be implicated by his critique of mass appeal media and consumerism.

Yves Stourdze, a noted semiologist, likens the graphic media which assaults the senses in implied (though nonexistent) sexuality as, to the core, pointless and neutral, imposing itself as an "syntactic nebula". The sterilization of the media is found precisely in its refusal to offer signifieds in which to invest. Instead it provides only an empty equivalence of formerly distinctive signs.,Choice, as presented through this language, appears more abundant, however intentionally confusing. But because of its meaning having been emptied by the aforementioned convergence of language, the choice is in essence pointless.

The creative sterilization and homogenizing of media allowed this rapidly growing number of consumers to feel they are in touch with themselves and one another. According to Woods, it reduced consumers to a unique passivity, which is historically new. The uniqueness of this passivity is found in the frantic velocity of material products and styles. Keeping pace requires action, constantly asking its consumers to be mobile and 'involved' with society and culture. In this, the consumer-citizen is immersed in a firmly bound sub-environment and is constantly stimulated by a barrage of identifiable material choices which appear both culturally, politically, and self referential. These choices identify which trend is accepted and rejected, how closely trends should be followed, where conscious decisions of conformity or nonconformity may place a person along this seemingly complex identity spectrum. The passive, latent states of

14. ibid
conformity and resignation are veiled by this material assault, in that highly political decisions (though not at all politically relevant) are made daily which seem to immediately impact the individual.

Aaron Rose, quoted earlier, implies an inherent artistic energy that is generated from an intense identification with compromised place and the consequences that ensue. When the imposer is not a tangible thing but a system of vacant signs and visual saturation, what exactly is the backlash?

In todays hierarchical society, centralized authority stands as the yardstick for measuring overall social stability as well as profitability. This is evidenced on a multitude of scales and scenarios, be it corporations, governments, or higher education. The visibility of a central figure (and its subsequent presentation) is synonymous with perceptions of profit, direction, drive, and focus; a centralized authority is the core of a consumer society. One only need recognize the transformation of people into singular brand identities, such as Martha Stewart or Charles Schwabb. With an individuals occupation (or, more relevantly, the image thereof) of the highest possible realm in ecopolitical hierarchy, we find that there is no longer a person, but a brand; an identity. In this arrangement, perception, global-image, and correct public identification is paramount in the guarantee of a stable, safe venture.

If we were to look at New York City just about the same time Pruitt-Igoe was destroyed, somewhere in the mid to late 1970's, we'd find similar social problems beginning to surface.

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Emergence of Graffiti
3.1 CONSTRUCTS OF NYC GRAFFITI

The South Bronx, an appropriate precedent for the future of American cities, became especially notorious for gangs, burnt-out abandoned buildings, drugs, and poverty during the 1970’s. This came about through a combination of ill-advised profit-based planning directives, and specifically, postindustrial conditions exacerbated by mass community relocation and destruction in the implementation of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Though some initiatives have had arguable success, venture capitalist Robert Moses’ Cross Bronx Expressway proposal supported very much his own proclivity for the automobile and highway culture over the interest of pre-war established communities, and dense, humanly navigable urbanity.

Gentrifying neighborhoods by slashing the urban fabric of one area with the express purpose of economically inflating another is one of the more grotesque tactics of ‘redevelopment’. Political figuratives aside, tangible structures are erected which form physical walls and barriers - margins - which locate and sequester now less photogenic people of cities behind the walls of fresh new proposals. Similar proposals implemented elsewhere in the city - along with a blatant disregard for the ramifications of such - only intensified the growing figurative and now literal rift between social classes.

Figure 23. The Cross-Bronx Expressway. These graphics illustrate how such proposals are rammed into an urban context, creating barriers by both volume and cavity. The canyon-like quality of the photograph at right is indicative of both.

Figure 24. Nothing says ‘let’s have a picnic’ like concrete beams and the symphony of rush-hour traffic. Even if a person were compelled to occupy this space, the presence of the fence clearlydomains this unused real-estate as private property.

Initiatives popping up left and right further compounded upon the problematic gentrification and redistricting of the city, thus perpetuating the struggle for a public community space among displaced marginalized groups. Development initiatives that located fringe, ‘irrelevant’ neighborhoods and squeezed the respective citizens gave birth to one surprising backlash: the appropriation of space for identity, or graffiti.

Writing Graffiti was not manifest from an obscure cultural form; the everyday handwritten signature was its starting point. Renaming oneself is an important part of a culture that relies so heavily on an individuals internalized perception and his or her personal relationship with the external. This could take the form of a nickname assigned by friends, family members, or others within the community. It could also result from being targeted by an ad campaign from a product supplier, food vendor, car salesman, what have you.

The occupants of these fringe margins of society cannot make the financial contribution that other targets can, depriving said individuals this rite of passage and acceptance into consumer society. However this fact does not change the tactics of a corporation or business buying the visual space of a community to advertise its elusive product. Having lost occupiable public

3. Ibid
spaces to highways, with no hope of reclaiming the public space of failed warehouses, individuals armed themselves with aerosol cans and fought image with image, demanding back the visual space in the most public of realms so that social realities could be voiced and identity established. This was done in a manner that was both abundantly expressive and irreverently critical of the vacant, visual culture of advertising. The late artist Margaret Kilgallen echoes this in her likening of advertising to “mind garbage.” Few question its presence and ubiquity; graffiti, she ascertains, is the outlet by which people put their own visuals in their neighborhoods. Something they can relate to that is expressive of their own social reality and identity.

The art form (only recently acknowledged as art) was recognized as ‘a dangerous, subversive threat to local authority’ by the New York Mass Transit Authority, along with the New York Times and other powerful regional institutions. New York City in the 1980s, tags, or smaller scaled pieces of graffiti, became like an uninterrupted city-wide wallpaper pattern on moving vans, streetlights, bus windows, and buildings. As tags competed for space, they also competed for skills and style; the unabashed proliferation found simply in an evolution of the children’s game “tag” in New York City. Someone would spray a blank wall and others would follow, respect going to those who covered the most ground. Because of graffiti’s constant

visibility and rampant proliferation, central authority could now give reason to sequestering the ‘animals of the margins’ whose lack of respect was tarnishing the otherwise pristine city.

The collective corporate voice that decried writing in the public sphere and on subways christened the art form as one of several symbols promoted as a stand-in for the sense that:

1. Something had gone fundamentally wrong, and
2. Its removal from the subways in the 1980s presented a visible task that could measure the progress of high minded efforts to right the wrongs of the lazy bastards of the periphery who had nothing better to do than filthy a perfectly good billboard.

Difficult questions (raised in the aftermath of decision making that destroyed first the neighborhood, then the city) proved to be too politically dangerous to articulate clearly in the public sphere. Rather than struggle with these hard issues directly, authorities shifted the focus for these fractures in the social order towards easier targets; one of which was graffiti on buildings and subways.

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The public image of graffiti and train writing could have been raised and recognized as a significant grassroots urban mural movement. After all, the New York Humanities Fund had just approved millions in tax-funded grants for 'urban beautification projects' that revolved around teaching "inner city youths the technique of exterior mural painting in their neighborhoods". Instead, it seemed more appropriate to burn millions in tax dollars to both the Humanities Fund and janitorial efforts to remove graffiti from where it should not be. The greater the effort invested in ridding the city of graffiti, the heavier it was laid on the trains and walls.
3.2 POLITICS OF GRAFFITI

Because Graffiti chooses to ignore the hierarchically defined zones of public and private space to demand an identity, the politics of its inception, placement, and proliferation is, in its order, a heterarchy (Woods' term for a unique social ordering amidst chaos). Given the dependence on subordinance and precedence, the hierarchical, as stated by Woods, “cannot embrace the heterarchical, and will therefore suppress it by any means, including intentional violence, its threat, even war”. The use of war in the below paragraph is compelling, and serves to credit the argument in its use:

*"The city's war against graffiti is reaping dividends: Arrests of the vandals have nearly doubled in the last year as cops have been snapping pictures of the scrawls to create a graffiti rogues' gallery."

As of last Sunday, there were 2,230 graffiti busts in the city, up from 1,154 during the same period last year - a 93.2% spike, police statistics show.

*"The doubling indicates how serious we take it," Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly told the Daily News. "The handwriting's on the wall. Vandals will be identified and arrested."


Placed in context, one becomes aware of the curious softening of the word to suit local spending agendas and propagandistic press conferences aimed at diverting and rearranging public perception so that writing is not only viewed

as vandalism, but perceived as the source of the problem. This, of course, is the same as blaming the garbage epidemic on flies, or the St. Louis housing epidemic on Pruitt-Igoe.

One can, however, recognize the commodification of writing - which has the potential to inappropriately bound its presentation and mediate its engagement with the audience - and therefore compromise its political content. The message, originally the name of the writer, becomes perhaps the name of a corporation in an identity shift who hopes to identify with young buyers. In this fashion, the piece is no longer placed contentiously or subversively; its deployment in this regard indeed negates its political instantiation, just the same as modern architecture and design was reduced to a hollow aesthetic institution.

The date of the above news-clip reads November 13, 2005. Writing could be seen in the consumer realm as early as the mid 1980’s. Graffiti had indeed gained a profitable notoriety and acceptance within the consumer realm; how is it still effective in its function as a political act? What is also compelling is graffiti’s unique persistence and longevity.

The placement of graffiti is highly contentious, as using the sides of buildings and trains - despite already being plastered with obnoxious graphics and intelligence-insulting
claims from camera-friendly faces - is a direct contravention of an expensive, private property. As such, graffiti-writing violates the hierarchically arranged perception of the public and private realm; it is the interjection of an unapologetic social dialogue within a commodified space, where the statement, by pattern, must be veiled and subtle in its establishment of identity. Graffiti disrupts this pattern of the commodified visual space, in that it (unlike advertising) has no interest in glorifying the viewer, nor is it veiled or subtle. It goes beyond the institutional expression of societal relations, and instead becomes both a formal critique and protest of societal consumer relationships. As such, graffiti and the fringe-arts directly reflect the realities of the social substrate from which they were born, and are inherently imbued with that specific social meaning and contextual relevance. Uniquely - and perhaps most significantly - because it is at its essence both destruction and creation, it will always have the capacity to overcome depoliticization by commodification.
3.3 Visual Vocabulary

Graffiti writing can be broken down into three different scales. From smallest to largest: the Tag, the Throw-Up, and the Roller, or wall-based mural painting. The political intentions and goals are largely consistent between the three scales; issues of ubiquity, visibility, permanence and complexity unite the three. The methods to which the aforementioned concepts are fulfilled in each scale vary significantly, thus establishing a dynamic and unique family of form.

The Tag

The Tag is the simplest, most rudimentary form of Graffiti. Because of its small scale, style is limited to expressive formal arrangements; color differentiation is generally not explored. At this scale though, the goal is not one of visual complexity, so much as it is all about ubiquity; visibility in repetition and recognition. Graffiti folklore references a writer who went by TAK187; a bike messenger who, at each stop he'd make in the city, would write his name various landmarks nearest his multiple destinations. This prompted a competition among other bikers, and soon Graffiti writers, to see who could cover the most real estate in the city. Maintaining the highest visibility among other writers was paramount in this game. The locations of the original tags among bike messengers also began to establish a visual identity among these workers; an identifiable, visual network created by the riders, expressive of the riders.

The Throw-Up

The Throw-Up is the next graduation in scale and complexity from the above, or “When a tag just doesn’t say enough”. Also known as ‘Pieces’ (short for masterpieces), Throw-Ups are very often found on subways, tunnels, street and highway billboards, and are generally more intricate. They are commonly written with Aerosol cans, require a longer time to create, and begin to incorporate complex color schemes that are consistent with the expressive formal arrangements of the letters. Because they are larger than tags, issues of ubiquity, network, and visibility are negotiated very differently; placement is oftentimes on or very near mass transit or busy throughways. This is an intentional placement, achieving a higher level of ubiquity by virtue of location or the moving ‘host structure’ that parades the painting around the city. Perhaps it could also be even simpler, in that near areas of traffic are also tunnels, partitions, physical barriers that cast shadows and offer visual protection from law enforcement.
Rollers
This is the largest scale of Graffiti writing. Though not as visually complex as a Throw-Up, getting a Roller up requires more accouterments than the other two scales: bucket paint, a roller and pan, improvised ladders, measuring tape. All this, because Rollers are usually placed high up on walls, where they can’t be touched, and they span the entire length of the wall—requiring more paint. Issues of identity, network, and ubiquity are fulfilled by its major visual impact on the graphic environment. The Anti-tag, this scale of graffiti need not bounce about the visual environment for attention.

Figure 36. SAKE sits proudly in front of a fresh roller.

9. ibid
Translating the Visual
And now, the summary. The major points. What was good? Post-war Consumerism gave birth to major design disciplines like graphic design, industrial design, and fashion design. These disciplines are generally regarded as profitable, respectable professions. Their products are largely accessible, and have the capacity to enrich the lives of the users. However their accessibility and profitability helped lay the foundation for a consumer-driven society whose unique economic sustainability is inextricably tied to paced social interaction, status, and expression. As society matured and technology advanced, consumerism became visibly pervasive, and advanced by dictating desire as opposed to responding to need. Architecture would ultimately be permeated by consumerism as well, and serve as a background facilitator of homogenized, material culture. This permeation sterilized even the social utopian goals of the early Modernists by rendering their agenda a single-layered formal institution whose complexity could not compete with the speed, politics, and socioeconomics of material culture. With both graphic and spatial environments implicated by consumerism, fabricated media and images were like an uninterrupted blanket across urbanity. The unique backlash to this which is most relevant to art and design is graffiti writing. Graffiti is the creative visual expression of social realities and a method to reestablish identity in vacant media-saturated environments. By simply existing, it is an immediate effective reflection of the commodified visual environment, and is therefore charged with social, political, and economic implications. In its essence, it achieved the politicization modern architecture hoped to, but never could.
How did this happen? A major reason boils down to the nature of identification. Graffiti is born from the disconnect between the need to express an intense identification with place and community and the profitable necessity to eradicate that desire. Modern proposals for communities are largely built around razing the existing landscape, replacing a dense urban fabric with gleaming, unfettered machines for living in its place. While need is indeed reflected, communities were derived from mass homelessness in Germany and realities of use are tragically overlooked in lieu of formal expression. A very real disconnect between use and need exists on many levels. It is thus the goal of the design portion of this thesis to draw expression from existing use overlaid with design accommodating an unaddressed need.

Following the step-by-step breakdown of the methodology, we examine three projects whose progression of scale and complexity borrows from graffiti's family of form.
4.2 THESIS METHODOLOGY

It is necessary to examine Graffiti's processes and methods of location and inception, and then expand on them where necessary to establish a consistent methodology between both institutions.

1. Examine the Existing Infrastructure.

Graffiti operates under a generally respected code of ethics. In the sport of Baseball, one may be aware of an unspoken 'code' that, while not in any rule book, is understood well by most all players. It is one of retaliation; as in, if your pitcher beans one of us, our pitcher beans one of you. It's The Code. Graffiti operates with a similar unspoken code of ethics: there are do's and don'ts that are understood and largely followed by writers. In "All City: The Book About Taking Space," Paul Laborite, who writes PAUL-107, offers this to beginners:

"No one's going to tell you what you can and can't hit. After all, the idea is to paint as much as you can, right? You should, however, avoid hitting places of worship, art installations, cars, small businesses (they have little to no dough), and statues. And basically stay away from anything that strikes a chord with "little people." Other than that, tag everything. Go all out. And once you've saturated your immediate surroundings, hit other neighborhoods."

If this statement is generally followed by writers, we can draw several key insights: In his off-limits list, Paul cites tangible structures, but also implicates them with respect to use and financial standing. This implies a degree of understanding of economic infrastructure and its relation to built form. There is also the reference to immediate surroundings, which is indicative of the grounding factors of community identification and local networks. To examine the existing infrastructure is thus the first point of the methodology.

2. Recognize the Supported use.

To understand the economic and political infrastructure of the built environment grounds the eventual placement of Graffiti in the context of use. Because we are investing the potential role of Graffiti from a spatial level, we must move deeper into the (dis)connection between infrastructure and use to honor the complexity of Architecture and the act of dwelling. It has been noted in the Background section of the document that, in architectures role within consumer society and commodified environments, the eventual occupation and use of a building has become largely proctored and scripted to maintain a meticulously wrought image. We must familiarize ourselves with that specific intended use to fully understand the existing infrastructure and to potentially locate anomalies or needs within.

3. Identify Unrecognized Use/Need.

There is an inherent complexity in the act of dwelling that, in proctored, mediated spaces, is either intentionally ignored, frowned upon, or forcefully suppressed. Spontaneous acts of dwelling, very much like graffiti, serve to point out the obviousness of carefully planned simulation of space by simply existing where they do and how they do. To allow the existence of the aforementioned interruptions is to forego branding strategy, image, marketability, and profit. This step will further the previous two by locating both deviations within the acceptable use and needs gone intentionally unfulfilled to maintain image.
4. Overlay the Potential New Use.

Once the suppressed uses and needs have been established, the next step will be to overlay the potential new uses onto the existing infrastructure and all it implies. As a methodology for Graffiti, this 4th step would serve as the last. As stated previously, Graffiti, as an overlay, causes no structural damage; it only disrupts the perceived visual intent of the surface on which it is applied. To capture this disruption and translate it to architecture, its fulfillment can yield both our most basic human needs and our aesthetic desires and have an inherent complexity and potential for richness beyond that of a graphic overlay.

5. Mediate the New Use with the Existing Use.

It is this last point that separates and expands the appropriation of the visual into the appropriation of the spatial. Graffiti, because it is a non-structural graphic overlay, is ultimately limited in how it can inspire or even facilitate change within the sociopolitical environment it so despises. It tends to requires the physical antithesis of billboards and advertisements to exist; the dissolution of rampant graphic media is essentially the dissolution of Graffiti. With Architecture, the dissolution of simulated space is not the dissolution of non-simulated space because, again, it is tied directly to our most basic human needs and functions; it will exist because we as humans exist. However, in negating one for the other lay constructs of environments who are expressive of nothing. The desire is for the expression of all acts, for the
seamless integration of art and life. This last step in the methodology will be to reconcile the new use with the existing infrastructure in such a way that both structures and uses are expressed, and ensure that the generous host structure is in turn bettered by the existence of the newly expressed use. It is imperative, above all, that the new use shall not disrupt the existing use, but is weaved into the existing infrastructure.

There is, with this thesis, an encouragement to violate the orderings. At the most basic level, the new use must disrupt the predictability of the old. The comfort in already having the ordering of spaces decided for you should be shaken. Privacy in a public studio. A bike path on the highway. A building hovering over a parking lot. These are explored as necessary implementations whose need arises only by evaluating spaces with regard to both the rhythm and spontaneity of human engagement, not the predictability of a shopping mall, whose ordering and pacing are inextricably tied to purpose and prediction. In disrupting spatial orderings that we unconsciously come to rely upon, we uncover a new series of choices to make regarding the simple act of dwelling. We expose the veiled privatization of supposedly “public spaces”.
Projects
Project 1 • Camargo Road

This first project begins the tripartite sequence in scales that project will borrow in exploring the visual hierarchy of graffiti. In relation to the tag, it will explore the tag and network most intensely. The site chosen is a connector road between two Cincinnati municipalities. There are many interesting anomalies and disconnects that are driven; these will be explored with respect to the tag, or the smallest scale of graffiti, to establish a means of bridging the gaps between unrecognized uses and suburban context.
Project 2 • DAAP

The next graduation in scale and complexity will begin to examine the methodology in the creation of occupiable space. Drawing inspiration from the Throw-Up, the idea and identity are still very present; because of the increase in scale, they must be implemented differently. The proposal will build from the previous project’s idea of various fabrics and infrastructures. In this case, the design will balance disconnects in use and need form a programmatic standpoint.
The third and final element of the three-part design program, located in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, is built around the roller. The elements of ubiquity and network exist in this exploration, as compared with the previous two. Issues regarding urban redevelopment, neglect, and mobility will be explored. The site was chosen for its proximity to the context of Pittsburgh’s urban renewal strategy. A design for an animation studio that hovers above a vacant lot now used for parking fulfills the programmatic requirements and strategy will express and call attention to both the immediate uses of the neighboring buildings, as well as the use of the street on which it exists.
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